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you'll find dual position aluminum handlebars. Out back are new LED tail and brake lights.

Standard features on the GS include centre stand, heated grips, luggage rack and manually adjustable windshield. In addition you can choose from three different trim packages to suit your needs. The Namibia Orange GS I tested was fully equipped with all the optional extras.

Throwing a leg over the adjustable 850/870 mm (33.5/34.2 in.) seat was a tiny bit of a stretch, despite my own six-foot-plus stature (The GSA has a stratospheric 915/895 mm seat).

Once in the cushy saddle, that's stuffed with even more foam than before, it only took minutes until I was feeling right at home. Riding position is upright and relaxed. The taller view serves as an excellent perch, especially in traffic.

The GS is nicely balanced at slow speeds, too, not hampered by either its height or its 199-kg (438 lbs.) weight. The tight steering lock is perfect for needling through traffic and other tight spaces.

Its windshield provides decent protection, but taller riders will notice some buffeting at speed even when fully adjusted.

The cockpit on my test bike was loaded with electronics. An optional on-board computer serves up a varied menu of readouts on its LCD display screen. They can be easily toggled using the Info switch on the left handlebar. There's also a digital gear selector and a handy digital tire pressure gauge.

Out on the tarmac, the 1170 cc flat twin boxer engine impresses. It's been given new or updated pistons, cams, airbox, exhaust and engine management. Power was boosted by 5% to 105 hp and it now redlines at 8,000 rpm. With 85 lb.-ft. of torque, there's enough low-end grunt, while the revs are higher through the mid-upper range.

An all-new gearbox has been finessed for quicker acceleration. It features a broader range of ratios for better low-speed traction and high-speed touring.

BMW's Enduro ESA, an off-road version of its Electronic Suspension Adjustment, is now an optional feature on the R1200 GS. Three damper settings (Sport, Normal and Comfort) can be adjusted on the fly from the left handlebar switchpod. Additional settings for solo riding, riding with a passenger, and with luggage are also part of the package.

Braking is superb with BMW's stop-on-a-dime integrated ABS system featuring Automatic Stability Control (ASC). With this combination, the bike's ECU monitors wheel spin and reduces power to regain traction if the rear wheel spins faster than the front. To play in the dirt, ABS can be switched off with the punch of a button on the handlebar (when the bike is stopped and in neutral).

Fully loaded, the BMW R1200 GS may be pricey, but it's the ultimate all-rounder.

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FACT FILE

2008 BMW R1200 GS

As Tested (before tax): \$20,950

Options: ABS, ASC, electronic suspension, hand protectors

Engine: 1170-cc, air/oil-cooled, flat twin Boxer

Fuel system: electronic fuel injection

Transmission: six-speed, final shaft drive

Horsepower: 105 hp @ 7,500 rpm

Torque: 85 lb.-ft. @ 5,750 rpm

Brake Front: dual 305-mm floating disc, 4-piston fixed calliper

Brake Rear: single 265-mm disc, two-piston floating calliper

Seat height: 850/870 mm (33.5/34.2 in.)

Fuel capacity: 20 litres (5.0 gal.)

Dry weight: 199 kg (438 lbs.)

Basic warranty: three years/unlimited km

Competitors: Buell Ulysses, KTM 990 Adventure, Suzuki V-Strom 1000

Strengths: engine, comfort, options

Weaknesses: some wind turbulence, tall seat for shorter riders

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